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Viewing cable 08ATHENS217, GREEK MFA ON RUSSIA/ABKHAZIA AND GREECE/RUSSIA

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08ATHENS217	2008-02-15 16:52	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 000217

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2018
TAGS: [GR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#) [RU](#) [KNAR](#)
SUBJECT: GREEK MFA ON RUSSIA/ABKHAZIA AND GREECE/RUSSIA

REF: SECSTATE 14840

Classified By: A/POLCOUNS JEFF HOVENIER. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Greek MFA Russian affairs directorate chief

Ambassador Tsamados said Greece had seen little evidence indicating Russia was serious about recognizing Abkhazia as independent and had no interest in altering Soviet-era borders. The GOG was not pleased by Putin's recent comments comparing the situation in Kosovo with that in northern Cyprus. On Greek-Russian relations overall, Tsamados said they were not driven by ideological or cultural factors, such as the common Orthodox heritage, but by pragmatism and commerce, particularly energy pipelines. Putin's authoritarianism was of concern, but Greece was not a "Russian Trojan Horse." END SUMMARY.

ABKHAZIA

12. (C) On February 15, DepPolCouns delivered reftel points on possible Russian recognition of Abkhazia to MFA A5 Directorate for Russia and CIS Countries Director Ambassador Nikolaos Tsamados, A5 First Counsellor for Georgian affairs Stella Bezirtzoglou, and A5 Counsellor for Russia affairs Elisabeth Fotiadou.

13. (C) Tsamados said his office had seen little evidence that the Russians were seriously considering recognizing Abkhazia. In fact, they had noticed an upswing in Russian-Georgian relations. A UDI by Kosovo followed by recognition by Western countries could complicate the situation, and Russia might want to "throw some salt into the wounds." Nevertheless, Tsamados believed any Russian noise on Kosovo would represent nothing more than saber rattling since Russia had little real interest in allowing alteration of old Soviet borders. Any alteration of Soviet borders, he argued, could set a precedent not only in Georgia but also for Chechnya, Dagestan, Yakutia, and other autonomy-minded Russian provinces.

14. (C) Tsamados said Athens took particular note of Putin's comments comparing the declaration of independence for Kosovo with a declaration of independence for northern Cyprus. Such comments, he pointed out, did little to win Greeks over to the Russian view.

GREECE-RUSSIA

15. (C) Tsamados also took the opportunity to discuss the broader Greek-Russian relationship. He said the relationship had little to do with ideology and was not really based on the Orthodox religion, which often amounted to a common faith dividing them. Greek-Russian relations, rather, were "business-like" and focused on pragmatic commercial deals, such as the pipelines. DepPolCouns noted that PM Karamanlis had lately been speaking positively about the Russian South Stream project but had not been as outspoken on the Turkey-Greece-Italy (TGI) gas interconnector, which could send investors a wrong signal. Tsamados and Fotiadou retorted that TGI was already well on its way to completion while South Stream was much earlier in the planning stages.

16. (C) They also characterized the recent Greek agreement to purchase Russian BMP armored personnel carriers from Moscow as driven by political factors surrounding PM Karamanlis's December visit to Moscow -- "any high-level visit needs to have some deliverables." It was also driven, in part, by the Greek arms industry, which had been in serious decline recently but would now participate in manufacturing the BMPs.

17. (C) DepPolCouns noted that the U.S. too wanted good, business-like relations with Russia and welcomed good Greek-Russian relations, but history demonstrated that an increasingly authoritarian Russia was an increasingly dangerous Russia, so commercial deals should be approached with caution. Tsamados granted the logic of this argument and said Putin's statements in his annual press conference yesterday contained some particularly worrisome statements. Nevertheless, Tsamados argued that Greece kept its national interests front and center and was not concerned that it was being drawn into a relationship that it could not control.

"We are not a Russian Trojan horse," he stated.

18. (C) Finally, Tsamados noted that Greece and Russia were close to completing an agreement that would return Jewish Thessaloniki archives stolen by the Germans and captured by the Soviets at the end of WW II. He provided no further details on the archives.

SPECKHARD